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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: improving public-sector effectiveness

Statement submitted by Congregations of St. Joseph, Franciscans International and World Association of Girls Guides and Girl Scouts, non-governmental organizations in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council; and Child Welfare League of America, Elizabeth Seton Federation, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation and Lutheran World Federation, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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As the future generation, young people have constant—often untapped—energy and passion to care and improve their environment. Youth NGOs, networks, and caucuses constantly consider issues surrounding water, and for this statement on priority theme improving public sector effectiveness, we choose to focus on the public sectors responsibility for water provision. This statement comes from a youth perspective, drafted by members of the NGO Committee on Youth in New York, with consultation of young people around the world via online networks, and with input from the recent World Youth Congress in Morocco.

Recognizing that the public sector provides over ninety percent of the water that is available to people around the world, that the public sector is a safety net for those who cannot afford the daily costs of living, and that the world's sources of water are rapidly diminishing;

Recognizing that Target 10 of the Millennium Development Goals requires halving by 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation;

Recognizing that the World Program of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond cites ten priority areas for youth involvement, and three of them—hunger and poverty, health, and environment—demand efficient use of water;

Recognizing that access to clean drinking water is a necessary condition for the eradication of poverty, which is a priority for the Division of Social Policy and Development;

Recognizing that as water will become a key source of conflict in the future, it is imperative to preserve and conserve all water resources, especially in light of rapid population growth;

We recommend that:

- Water should be declared a human right by the General Assembly. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has already declared that access to clean water is a human right.

- Privatized systems still must have community input. Most foreign direct investment goes to large-scale projects which do not allow for local participation. Water arrangements in Porto Alegre in Brazil and Dhaka in Bangladesh provide examples of participatory and co-operative water management that is publicly owned and efficient.

    - As outlined in Paragraph 18.34 of Agenda 21, all states should encourage youth to get involved in national and community water management. We encourage local youth councils to take part in their community management practices. Educating more marginalized citizens—like young people and women—has proven to strengthen community water management systems.

- Good governance and accountability must go hand in hand with privatization. Private companies bring in financial resources that developing nations could not otherwise muster, but access to clean water for people should not depend solely on their purchasing power.

- One of the dangers of privatization is that conservation is not seen as profitable. The profit motive that drives private companies often conflicts with the public interest and can lead to dangerous logic such as -- reducing consumption reduces profits.

- Periodic evaluation and checks and balances on privatized systems are essential. So far, there are few "best practices" in privatization that have worked to benefit people. The city of Atlanta recently canceled its 20-year contract with Suez due to poor water quality and higher than projected cost after just four years. If powerful cities like Atlanta cannot get a good deal, how will lesser developed nations fare? A recent careful evaluation of the consequences of the privatization of water in the Larger

Metropolitan Area of Manila (Philippines) completely confirm the problems of higher costs and poor water quality and adds the problem of poor access.

- Educational water initiatives, particularly those targeted to youth in developing countries should continue to receive prominence as a top global priority. Coinciding with the forthcoming Decade for Education on Sustainable Development, the public sector should create programs to educate teachers on conservation and effective water management. We encourage the public sector to provide education on water conservation to students and youth as well as the general public through formal and non formal education.

- Fulfill international financing promises. To strengthen public sectors around the world, developed nations need to allocate 0.7% GDP for ODA as agreed. This money should be used to build and strengthen the efficiency of the public sector in water provision.

    - Debt servicing significantly competes with the adequate funding of the public sector. Canceling and negotiating debts by providing innovative alternatives to meet commitments are necessary so that governmental resources are used to advance social well being instead of international financial organizations.

- Access to safe water has direct public health affects in terms of hygiene and sanitation. The majority of people in underdeveloped countries use unhygienic latrines resulting in health and environmental hazards. In order to improve the public health condition it is necessary to:

    (1) provide pure drinking water, when necessary setting Arsenic free tube wells and create safe water reservoirs;

    (2) encourage safe sanitation by supplying low cost materials to build sanitary latrines;

    (3) undertake national motivation campaigns to promote public health awareness in hygiene and existing health care facilities;

    (4) engage young people in public health campaigns by providing them with short term training and basic equipment;

    (5) promote the employment of young people in the water and sanitation sector as trainers, awareness workers, project developers and entrepreneurs;

    (6) facilitate technical and other assistance to youth groups trained in health and hygiene.